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Preprint · March 2021

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.26270.25921

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The ‘New Towns’ of Paraná, Brasil

by Fabiano Fazion

1. Introduction

Between the 1920s and the 1950s, a private commercial venture was intended to carry out the colonization of a big area hitherto little explored in northwestern Paraná. Colonization was planned, and aimed to create an extensive network of rural lots, accompanied by a complex structure of cities, which would serve both to provide support (logistical, institutional, cultural, religious, etc) for the people who would inhabit the countryside, as would enable the existence of the structure needed to give vent to agricultural production that, as it was thought, would originate from there.

The project was conceived by a group of English investors and had the participation of Brazilian technicians and workers, and was subsequently sold to Brazilian investors.

Among the colonization characteristics, noteworthy the land occupation model, based on small farms, and the urban centers in a hierarchy according to two basic categories:

a) small towns, distributed approximately evenly over the territory in order to supply the most immediate needs of the inhabitants of rural areas, which received less structural and symbolic investments;
b) major cities, evenly distributed along the main railroad axis, concentrating the greater investments both in infrastructure and in the symbolic goods (urban design, forestation, etc.)

2. Relations between the garden cities, the New Towns and the cities in the northwestern Paraná.

The great British imperialist expansion, since the mid-nineteenth century, had as one of its characteristics the interest in private investments, as much in the colonies as in the areas of influence of the Empire.[1]

[1] HOBSBAWM, Eric J. **The age of empires: 1875-1914**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2006.

Brazil was one of these areas of influence, and several British investments were made in the country since it began its opening up to trade, with the arrival of the Portuguese court. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century, both companies of British capital settled there, as investors and Brazilian businessmen, joined the British capital to develop their businesses.[2]

In this context, it was also the British who represented one of the greatest influences in the very conception of the investments that took place in Brazil; the growth of cities linked to industrial development (especially São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) had British investments in urban infrastructure companies (trams, street lighting and electricity supply, gas supply, etc.) and also focused on the exploitation of the enormous potential linked to the operation of urban land.

This resulted in projects aimed at expanding the urbanized areas of the cities or exploring some regions less developed within existing urban spots. The English capital used to bring its technicians to perform work related to physical ownership (topographers) and to develop the projects (architects and engineers)[3].

In one of these projects was brought to Brazil the architect Barry Parker, to work on projects of the first 'garden-neighborhoods' of the country. Parker had been one of the responsibles for projects of English garden cities, and had since achieved worldwide fame, developing projects in several countries[4]. In the office of the company where Parker developed his projects, worked as his assistant the young Brazilian engineer Jorge de Macedo Vieira, who was strongly influenced by the ideas of the English architect and that will reappear later in this story.

An English mission that visited Brazil in the early twentieth century, with the objective of

> *assist the government of President Arthur Bernardes to consolidate Brazil's debt with England, as well as to reformulate our tax system*[5]

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[2] There is an interesting explanation about the interests and the British investments in Brazil in the nineteenth century in CALDEIRA, Jorge. **Mauá - Businessman of the Empire**. Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995. We can find a description of this topic, but after the Imperial period, in REGO, Renato Leão. **Cities planted:. The British and the construction of the northern Paraná landscape**. Londrina: Humanidades, 2009.

[3] cf. REGO, Renato Leão. op. cit

[4] Exposition '**The Urbanism of Engineer Jorge de Macedo Vieira'** presented at the IV Bienal Internacional de Arquitetura, São Paulo, 1999. Available at http://www.amjs.org.br/expoini.htm

[5] CMNP (Northern Paraná Improvements Company) report, available at http://site996.provisorio.ws/melhoramentos/historia/

brought among its members Lord Lovat, a Scottish nobleman who was involved with large agricultural investments in Sudan[6], and had been tasked by the *Sudan Plantations* shareholders to study the investment opportunities in Brazil, in order to get cotton to supply the thriving textile industry of England[7].

Lovat, alerted by Gastão Mesquita Filho, a young engineer who built the railroad Ourinhos-Cambará, to the potential that meant the lands then still little explored at the northwestern of Paraná, and taking advantage of the fact that these same lands had relatively low prices due the difficulties of access and problems relating to titrations of possession, went back to England imbued with the purpose of convincing its partners in the Sudanese investments to invest also in Brazil.

When he obtained the necessary capital, Lovat created a company for the activities in Brazil, returned to the country and initiated the necessary actions to achieve his goal: recruited Brazilian auxiliaries (including Mesquita Filho), did a recognition of the area and bought[8] to the newly created CTNP ('Company of Northern Paraná Lands') areas that came to reach the amount of 1.236.000 hectares:

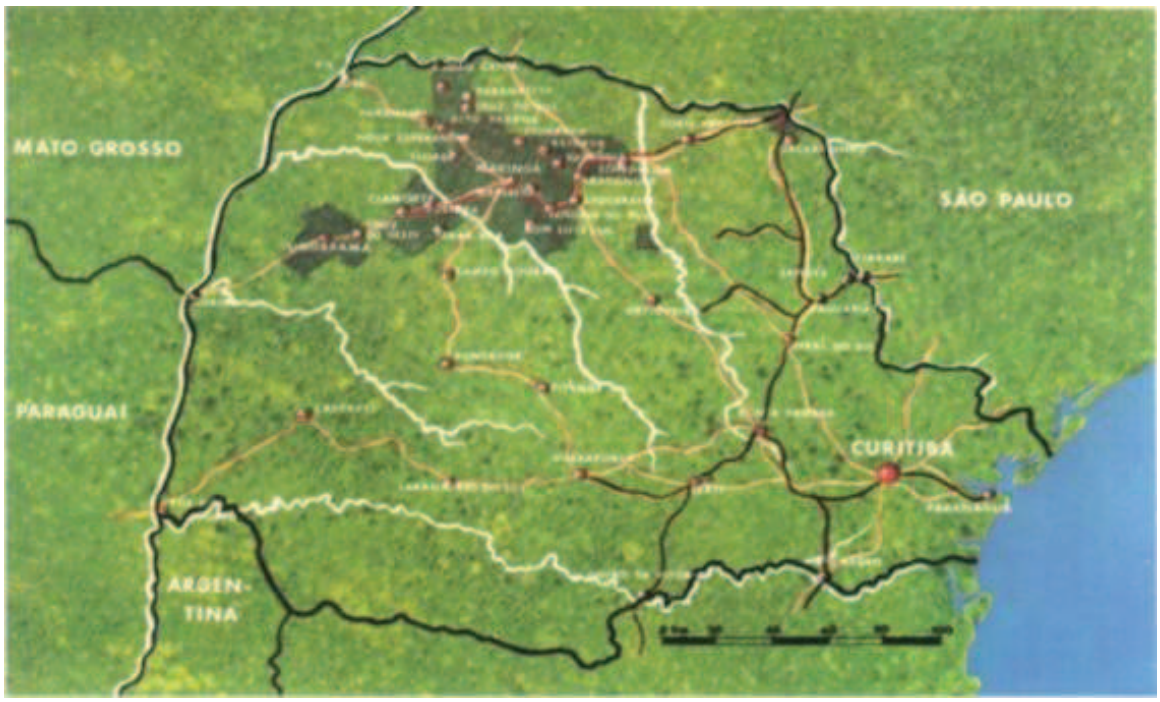

fig. 1 - Lands of CTNP/CMNP at Paraná

[6] cf. REGO, Renato Leão. op. cit.
[7] The same of note 5
[8] There are doubts if all the land was bought or if some parts were, in fact, taken illegally from former possessors. Scholars couldn't yet end this discussion.

In June 1929 the CTNP took stake control of São Paulo-Paraná Railway Company and began gradually to expand the railway line toward its lands[9].

The British colonization project was composed of some additional elements: the agricultural land would be divided into small farms (5 to 15 bushels); the farms would be served, in terms of services and infrastructure, by a number of small towns spread throughout the territory of colonization; the railroad would be the master axis that would pass through the cities and connect them with the rest of the country (especially the ports), allowing both the access to cities such as enabling the flow of agricultural and timber production[10].

Still along the railway, but distributed at distances of about 100 km apart, would be created some larger cities that would centralize the economic and cultural life of the region. For these cities the CTNP intended to carry out major economic and symbolic investments, understanding that only in this way they would become poles of attraction of people and of more investment.

The first city created was Londrina. There was an urban design, relatively little elaborated and made in a technicist way. However, political and administrative problems caused the CTNP to abandon the idea of making Londrina its headquarters, and the company decided to design the next big city of its project for it to assume this central role[11].

Chosen the location of the new city, the CTNP decided to take some precautions to ensure its success, especially doing a good urban design. In the opinion of the British, influenced by all the discussions that were going on in their country for decades, a good city project should follow the projetual tradition of the garden cities, or, more specifically, the derivation of those that, bereft of Howard's controversial positions in relation to land tenure, generated garden neighborhoods and garden suburbs in cities across the world, and, later, the English New Towns.

As there was in Brazil an engineer who had worked with Parker in the project to São Paulo, he was chosen for the job that CTNP wanted. So Jorge de Macedo Vieira projects the city of Maringá. Some years later, at the stage where the controlling interest

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[9] cf. REGO, Renato Leão. op. cit.

[10] Over the years, rail lost prominence and road transport was developed. It was gradually created a network of highways and the small towns spread across the territory of CTNP. See about in CMNP. Colonization and Development in northern Paraná. CMNP: s / l 1975

[11] All following factual information are referenced in CMNP. **Colonization and development of northern Paraná**. op. cit., and REGO, Renato Leão. **Cities planted: the British and the construction of the northern Paraná landscape**. op. cit., except when explicitly mentioned.

of the company had passed for Brazilians, including Gastão de Mesquita Filho, the engineer also would design the next of the 'big cities' of the Company, Cianorte[12].

4. Maringá: a conceptual positioning.

Fig. 2 - Draft for Maringá – Jorge de Macedo Vieira

Maringá was envisioned in a period in which important changes had taken place in CTNP. Because of the serious economic consequences that hit Britain during and after World War II, the British government ordered the country's entrepreneurs and financiers to repatriate their capital, which was done. In this way, CTNP shareholders put up for sale its assets in Brazil, and, after a series of negotiations, the control of the company was taken over by a group of Brazilian businessmen. Among these entrepreneurs was Gastão de Mesquita Filho, who had remained connected to the company since its principle, and then goes on to preside it. Mesquita was aligned to the way of thinking of the English about the enterprise, having indeed take part in its conceptual elaboration, and thus the project's direction practically remained unchanged, except perhaps in the aspects most linked to conjunctural matters.

The company, now renamed Northern Paraná Improvements Company (CMNP), continued with the plans of colonization and commissioned Macedo Vieira to design a

[12] The Company created, over the years, the 4 ‘big cities’ and more 31 small and medium-sized ones; other 14 small and medium-sized cities were created by private investments in the lands of the Company.

city that was intended to become the hub of the region. Thus, there was a concentration of effort (physical and conceptual) for the city to achieve the standards of excellence that the company wanted, which included a design in the molds of a 'garden city', but, being itself a commercial enterprise, with the sale of urban and rural lots constituting one of the main sources of funds (profits) for CMNP[13].

Although the notion of environmental heritage was to become a frequent speech only decades later, the British were aware, since at least the mid-nineteenth century, of the disastrous consequences generated by the destruction of natural conditions for the implementation of the various human activities; their country had deeply experienced these consequences derived especially from the industrial revolution. Therefore, concerns that we would now call 'ecological' were part of the design assumptions, such as the preservation of parts of the native forest in the bottom of the valleys and the implementation of the city greatly respecting the natural topography of the land. However, without the monitoring of the ecologists of our days, to carry out the works of demarcation of lots and streets and to enable their occupation in the fastest way, except in the reserves in the bottoms of valleys and some other small reserves, the forest was all overthrown.

But CMNP was aware that such a procedure would generate a very degraded environment aspect, so it was ordered a specific study to re-forest the city, but taking advantage, to it, of the sidewalks and squares designed and demarcated. Thus would be generated an interesting, warm and inviting landscape even before the first potential buyers come to know the new venture, which would serve as attractive during the negotiations and would provide a better quality of life for the pioneers, that faced a number of difficulties in their early days in the new cities[14].

This tree planting was to become paradigmatic, influencing the direction of the city development, which thereafter would deploy a dense forestation along the streets

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[13] One of the basic premises of Howard's proposals, namely that the city should be a profitable enterprise, remained and proved to be successful in the cities of CMNP. The difference is that Howard proposed that the 'profits' of the city (progressive valuation of land, leasing of public areas and buildings reverting to a common fund, etc.) should be reversed to the community, while CMNP got all profits in the Paraná case - at least all direct profits, since, as the very CMNP claimed, the owners of urban land also benefited from the appreciation of urban areas and the growing trade and flow of goods and services (which also occurs, in varying degrees, in any other city).

[14] Among these difficulties it is worth mentioning the poor condition of roads and urban streets, the intense heat in much of the year, the myriad of insects and other animals from the forests of the region, the difficult access to various goods and commodities, etc. Reports in CARVALHO, Maria Cristina Wolff de. (coord.). **Towards North of Paraná: borders, flows and contacts**. São Paulo: Marcos Carrilho Architects, 2014.

and avenues that would be built, counting on a specialist staff in its creation and implementation, counting indeed on a landscape concept. This environment would also decisively influence the inhabitants of the city, which over the first decades of the city cultivated a many trees in their yards, with plenty of fruit and flowers, and creating a shading greatly appreciated in a region where the heat is intense in most of the year. Circulated among Maringá's inhabitants, in the 1970s, the reputation that Maringá was the 'most wooded city in Brazil'; although no one was worried about giving statistics about it, it was quite credible that it was effectively so, given the environment and the landscape dominated by trees that still defines the city since our days.

It is interesting to observe the inclusion of the creation of Maringá in a broader context. Maringá was designed in the mid-1940s, and inaugurated in 1947, i.e., at a time when the Modernists had already advanced well in the process of becoming worldwide hegemonic; several CIAM had already happened, there was already the 'Athens Charter' and at Brazil it existed at least one major state project designed according to the Modernists molds (the headquarters building of MES, in Rio de Janeiro), while several other significant Modernist buildings were being built (Santos Dumont Airport, the ABI headquarters, etc.)[15]. However, both the English and the Brazilian who succeeded them in the company's command remained immune to modernist influences for the design of their major cities, even considering that the cities they thought as smaller and less important have been designed by less sophisticated technicians and, therefore, they tended to be projected more on 'rational' regular grids; even in these more 'simple' cities (in fact, simplistic) the modernist ideology does not appear as defining. This process makes it clear how arbitrary are the modernist pretensions to establish the standard of what is 'rational', 'functional', etc., and that now, in the shadow of modernist hegemony that still haunts us, look so naturalized that it seems impossible to think of the cities and the overall architecture without recourse, at least partially, to the Modern Movement canons.

As Bourdieu taught, the 'cultural arbitrary' has its strength precisely in its being and remaining concealed and naturalized to the point of being perceived as natural[16]. The arbitrary of the modernist option prevailed through all legitimate instances

[15] Details about this process can be checked in FAZION Fabiano. Hegemony in Construction: The MES headquarters building and the consolidation of Modern Architecture in Brazil. Master's thesis in History. Curitiba: UFPR, 2010.

[16] cf. Bourdieu, Pierre. The Symbolic Goods Market. in **The Economics of Symbolic Exchange**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2007.

(museums and cultural institutions, educational system, state sponsorships), so that all legitimated critics and analyzes have their base in the interpretative standards set by Modernism itself and remain submissive to this pattern (for pleasure or interest); hence the phenomenon of new CMNP cities is seen today as if it were a certain anachronism, something out of its time, almost a remnant of projective postures of the nineteenth century[17].

We see, however, that the enterprise of CMNP can be understood as a true counterpoint to Modernist ideas about urban planning, because, unlike the failure of the Modernists in creating pleasant cities according to their conceptions[18] (and fortunately, due to the inability of the modernists to advanced further with their proposals), the CMNP created extremely pleasant cities whose success (as enterprises and as places to live) demonstrates the possibility to visualize 'another modernity', that could have happened if the modernist hegemony had not succeeded in imposing itself; and explore the possibilities unrealized historically can serve both as a basis for critical analysis of what took place and to consider alternatives for future interventions.

6. Conclusion - New Towns

The big cities created by the colonization of CMNP in northwestern Paraná keep deep relationship with the garden cities, garden neighborhoods and suburbs, and the English New Towns of mid-twentieth century. However, this Brazilian venture took a long time to be incorporated as an object of study by the Brazilian academia, and remains absent from important books on the subject[19]. Some scholars have in recent years, however, begun to focus their attention on the venture, especially those linked to institutions such as the UEM and the UEL[20]. However, such studies focus more on the (alleged) aspects of social segregation contained in projects, or remain attached to the idea that the Paraná case is more akin to a tradition of the nineteenth century than to a

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[17] The study of REGO, op. cit., fits this pattern

[18] See about this matter: GEHL, Jan. **Cities for people**. We can also find converging comments in JACOBS, Jane. **Death and life of great American cities**. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2000, and in BERMAN, Marshall. **All that is solid melts into air: the adventure of modernity**. São Paulo: Companhia de Bolso, 2007, among others.

[19] It is especially interesting to note that the introduction of Dacio Ottoni to the book of Ebenezer HOWARD, **Garden cities of tomorrow**. op. cit. commenting on the influence of Howard's ideas in Brazil, does not mention the Paraná case, although it cites Goiania and even Brasilia! The book by OSBORN, Frederic J. and Whittick, Arnold. **The New Towns. The Answer to Megalopolis**, op. cit., brings almost literally the same comments of Ottoni and also takes no notice of the CMNP cities. The coincidence of the texts is probably not casual.

[20] Universities located in Maringá and Londrina.

viable alternative to the Modernist ideas, that remains untouched as the one that is connected innately to the aspects of contemporary, so that any other design is considered anachronistic, utopian or disconnected from reality.

Careful observation of the cities of CMNP, especially Maringá and Cianorte, makes it clear that this view does not hold, since they have proven over the decades as totally viable and that their non-modernist features, rather than the characterizing as exotic or bizarre examples, appear as counterexamples, as what might be done rather than the incorporation of modernist ideas, in order to produce more interesting and pleasant cities.

Facing the situation of urban crisis and conceptual uncertainty we experience, such examples are encouraging, showing that it is possible to be tuned to modernity without being Modernists, and that perhaps the resumption of the view that we must create 'New Towns' to distribute the urban growth and the population flows should be taken seriously again as an interesting and viable alternative.

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